# Chapter 1: Vision

## Introduction

Our vision for future management of the Bitterroot National Forest is an integration of input from the public comments we have received, the Forest Service mission statement, national Forest Service goals, recent changes and trends affecting the Bitterroot National Forest, and best science. This vision is expressed in the Land Management Plan as desired conditions.

## Desired Condition

Desired conditions describe the ecological, economic, and social conditions that we expect to exist in the future. This Plan presents three types of desired conditions: "forest-wide," "geographic areas," and "management areas."

**Forest-wide desired conditions** apply across the landscape. Each forest-wide desired condition contributes to the achievement of the agency mission and goals. This is the most general level of desired conditions.

**Geographic area desired conditions** are specific to an area or place, such as a river basin or valley, and reflect community values and local conditions within the area. They do not substitute for or repeat forest-wide desired conditions. The Bitterroot National Forest is divided into five geographic areas (see map of Bitterroot National Forest geographic areas later in this chapter). These desired conditions allow us to focus on circumstances that are unique to a specific geographic location.

**Management area desired conditions** are indications of what future conditions would typically be desired in each management area. They help clarify the general suitability of various parts of the forest for different activities and management practices (these are part of the "suitability of areas" component in Chapter 2). For example, in an area identified as generally suitable for non-motorized use, the desired condition might be to maintain dispersed recreation sites at a primitive level. These desired conditions help us clarify what outcomes might be expected in land areas with different general suitability descriptions.

In some cases, our desired condition matches the current condition so Plan direction is focused on maintaining what we have. But in other cases, we need to work toward meeting the desired conditions and success in achieving them can only be measured over the long-term.

The Forest may need to make adjustments in the desired conditions if monitoring results indicate they are not achievable in the long-term or are no longer desirable. Budget levels are an important factor in moving toward the desired conditions. The objectives in Chapter 2 identify what the Forest believes it can accomplish over the next 10 to 15 years. Desired conditions are aspirations; they are not final decisions or commitments to action.

# Forest-Wide Desired Conditions Component

The Bitterroot National Forest intends to move toward these forest-wide desired conditions over the next 10 to 15 years although they may not all be achieved for many decades. Some desired conditions may be very difficult to achieve, but it is important to move toward them over time.

Plan Components

**Desired Conditions**
Objectives
Suitability of Areas
Special Areas
Guidelines

## Soils, Watersheds, and Aquatic Ecosystems

### Background

Lands within the Bitterroot National Forest supply water that supports a variety of uses throughout the Bitterroot valley. Watersheds and aquatic ecosystems have changed from historic conditions. Current conditions and trends indicate:

- A steady decline in migratory bull trout numbers in the main stem of the Bitterroot River, and to a lesser degree in the East Fork and West Fork, during the past several decades.
- Stable or inconclusive trends in resident bull trout numbers in forest streams since 1990.
- Common threats to water quality, bull trout and other aquatic species include irrigation and diversion activities (mainly off national forest lands), the presence of non-native species, road impacts (such as sediment delivery and encroachment into streams), and fish migration barriers, particularly culverts and diversion structures.
- Over 70 percent of culverts are barriers to native fish migration during some part of the season.

- Several stream reaches are listed as impaired by the State of Montana under the Clean Water Act.
- A reduction in vigor and extent of riparian shrubs has occurred, primarily in areas where fire has been excluded for many decades.

During the last several years, the Bitterroot National Forest has been working to restore watershed and aquatic habitat conditions by implementing best management practices, removing excess roads, improving road conditions (reducing sediment), removing fish migration barriers, cooperating in the installation of fish screens at diversion sites, implementing riparian conservation strategies, and applying threatened and endangered species conservation strategies.

Forest-Wide Desired Condition Plan Component

## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Soil organic matter (in the soil and on the surface), soil physical conditions, and coarse woody material would be at levels that maintain ecological systems, soil productivity, soil hydrologic function, and hillslope stability. Soils would have adequate physical, biological, and chemical properties to support desired vegetative growth and nutrient cycling within historic disturbance regimes.

b. Stream channels access their floodplains regularly. These seasonal flows recharge riparian aquifers and provide late-season stream flows and cold water temperatures. Channels transport water, sediment, and woody material over time, while maintaining their dimensions (bankfull width, depth, and entrenchment ratios; slope and sinuosity). Stream channels and floodplains are ever-changing, but they are resilient to disturbance. The water balance between streams and their watersheds allow for a natural frequency and magnitude of base flows and flood flows.

c. Water quality meets or exceeds applicable state standards and supports native amphibians and diverse invertebrate communities.

d. Bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations would be strong, self-sustaining, well-distributed, and well-connected, forming metapopulations that can expand and endure natural disturbances. Human-caused migration barriers, such as culverts or other structures, for these species are absent unless they prevent invasion of non-native species.

e. In the Idaho portion of the Bitterroot National Forest, migratory populations of chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and pacific lamprey would be strong, self-sustaining, well distributed, and well connected.

f. Impacts of non-native fish on bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout would be minimal or absent.

g. Riparian conservation areas (RCAs) would provide:

- Woody material for fish habitat and channel stability.
- Vegetation conditions that effectively trap and store sediment.
- Vegetation and stream channel conditions that are sufficient to route water and sediment during flood events, regulate water table elevations, and provide for natural ranges of water temperature.
- Terrestrial and aquatic habitats that would provide for ecosystem diversity and support species diversity.

h. Sediment deposits from over-bank floods allow floodplain development and the propagation of flood-dependent riparian plant species.

i. Instream habitat features, such as temperature, pool frequency, large woody material, and width/depth ratios would be within reference ranges[1].

j. Instream flows would be sufficient to provide for channel maintenance, water quality, aquatic habitat, and riparian vegetation.

k. Aquatic habitats and species would provide high quality recreational fisheries.

## Vegetative Composition, Size Class, and Structure[2]

### Background

The diversity of vegetation species, size classes, densities, and the patterns across the landscape together create the variety of plant and animal habitats that contribute to ecological sustainability. Vegetation, and the processes that affect it, varies with elevation from the valley bottom to the alpine glaciated lands. In general, disturbance processes result in a pattern of live, dead, and dying vegetation across the landscape.

[1] Reference ranges of instream habitat features are described in the Plan Set of Documents.
[2] Species composition and size class are derived from multiple sources: Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA), Region One Vegetation Map (R1VMP), SIMPPLLE model, 1930 inventory interpretation, (Losensky, Berglund), and historical records (Lieberg, Ayers).

On the Bitterroot National Forest, many plant communities and conditions have changed from what they were in the past. This is important because the diversity of habitats that existed historically has sustained the native plant and animal species we value and enjoy today. These historical conditions have also maintained the inherent productivity of the land and produced ecosystems that are resilient to disturbances such as fire, insects, and diseases.

The change from historical conditions varies by vegetation type. Ponderosa pine communities, in particular, have experienced a large shift in composition and structure. Changes in vegetation have been caused by many different factors including fire suppression, introduction of invasive plant species, timber harvesting, diseases, insects, and periodic drought.

The key ecological factors and trends observed or analyzed over the decades show:

- Forest conditions and long-term drought culminated in several large fires in 2000, in which over 300,000 acres of the Bitterroot National Forest burned. Many areas burned more severely than typically experienced under historic fire regimes. Tree regeneration has been dominated by Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine. Natural seeding of ponderosa pine has been scarce.
- Approximately 44 percent of the forest reflects a high or moderate departure from historic fire regimes, resulting in increased surface, ladder, and aerial fuels across all forest types.
- There has been a large increase in shade tolerant tree species and lodgepole pine in all size classes, compared to historic conditions.
- Shade intolerant species are less common than they were historically in size classes greater than nine inches in diameter at breast height (dbh).
- Old growth habitat occupies approximately 12 percent of forested acres, excluding recently burned areas[1].
- Recent increases in insects and diseases have resulted in widespread and/or chronic tree mortality, loss of valuable forest habitat, and reduction in tree growth.
- Snags and downed wood have increased recently due to fires, insects, and diseases.

[1] *Old Growth Types of the Northern Region* (Green et al. 1992, errata corrected 02/05). Tables and descriptions for western Montana are quantified by an identified habitat type, tree size, tree age, trees per acre, and basal area per acre.

- The acreage of multi-storied stands has increased and single-storied forests have decreased.
- An increase in invasive plants has occurred, especially on grasslands and south-facing aspects with less than 40 percent canopy cover below 6,500 feet. New invasive species threaten to dominate riparian zones and wetlands and further impact grasslands and grass-dominated understory plant communities. The Bitterroot National Forest is a stronghold for spotted knapweed with roughly 275,000 acres infested.



## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Species Composition[1]: The following table displays the desired condition for species composition for forest and non-forest vegetation.

Table 2: Species composition desired condition.

| Dominant Vegetation Type | Forest-Wide Desired Condition | Existing Condition | Need for Change[2] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Forest vegetation types (Approximately 1.3 million acres) | | | |
| Ponderosa pine (PP) | 16 to 47% | 6% | Increase by 10 to 41% |
| Douglas-fir (DF) on dry sites | 10 to 29% | 32% | Decrease by 3 to 22% |
| Shade intolerant mixed species (PP, western larch, white bark pine, LP, DF) on moist sites | 15 to 55% | 24% | Maintain or increase by 31% |
| Lodgepole pine (LP) | 2 to 16% | 19% | Decrease by 3 to 17% |
| Shade tolerant western red cedar, grand fir, and western hemlock | 1 to 3% | 1% | Maintain |
| Shade tolerant Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir | 3 to 10% | 18% | Decrease by 8 to 15% |
| Subtotal | | 100% | |
| | | | |

[1] Species composition derived from multiple sources: Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA), Region 1 Vegetation Map (R1VMP), SIMPPLLE model, 1930 inventory interpretation (Losensky, Berglund), Historical records (Lieberg, Ayers).
[2] The percent change is a percentage of total forested or non-forested acres, as appropriate.

c. Vegetation conditions that are resilient to disturbances, such as fire, insects, and diseases, would dominate the landscape.

d. Distribution of both living and dead trees would be consistent with historic conditions.

e. Tree densities and fuel conditions would be consistent with historic fire regimes.

f. Whitebark pine and alpine larch communities would dominate more than two percent of the forested vegetation types.

**Large Burned Areas**

g. In warm, dry ponderosa pine/Douglas-fir communities, post-fire fuels would range from five to ten tons per acre.

h. In the moist, cool to cold community types, the continuity of large tracts of standing and downed, fire-killed trees would be separated by areas of low fuel loads that range from 10 to 20 tons per acre.

**Old Growth**

i. Old growth habitat would occupy 15 to 20 percent of the forest and be consistent with historical disturbance patterns for each forest type[1].

**Snags and Downed Wood**

j. Snags and downed wood would be present within a range that is consistent with historical disturbance and succession.

**Grasslands**

k. Grasslands would have less than ten percent of the area covered by conifers.

**Fire Behavior**

l. Wildland fires within the wildland urban interface (WUI) would be non-lethal, ground fires, meaning less than 20 percent of overstory trees would be killed.

**Invasive Plants**

m. Areas without invasive plant species would remain free of weeds.

[1] The structure of old growth varies for each forest type. For example, old growth ponderosa pine forests tend to be single-storied, while old growth Engelmann spruce – subalpine fir forests are usually multi-storied.

FW Desired Condition Plan Component

n. At least 8,000 acres of grasslands would be free of weeds.

o. Invasive plant species that exist on the landscape would occupy less than 130,000 acres and would not spread to new areas.

p. Plants categorized as "new invaders" would not exist on the landscape.

## Air Quality

### Background

The Clean Air Act and subsequent amendments give federal land managers the responsibility to protect Air Quality Related Values in Class 1 areas and to protect human health and basic resource values in all areas. The Selway-Bitterroot and Anaconda-Pintler wilderness areas are Class 1 attainment areas where very little deterioration of air quality is allowed. All other areas on the Bitterroot National Forest are Class 2 where only moderate deterioration of air quality is allowed. Missoula is the closest non-attainment area that fails to meet national ambient air quality standards for particulate matter 10 microns in size (PM10) during some portion of the year, although all land management activities on the Bitterroot National Forest occur outside the non-attainment boundary. The greatest potential for the Forest to affect air quality would be from smoke (wildfires, prescribed fires, and campfires) and road dust.

FW Desired Condition Plan Component

### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

- The use of fire, timber harvesting, and integrated pest management needed to achieve desired vegetation conditions would be accomplished while remaining within national and state air quality standards.

## Wildlife and Plant Species Diversity

### Background

Large scale assessments of landscape condition and trends within the interior Columbia River basin have identified at least three major causes for changes in forested habitat conditions since early European settlement. These include: wildfire exclusion, timber harvesting, and road development. Some habitat factors and risks to wildlife and plants include:

- An increasingly fragmented landscape and uncharacteristic vegetation structures.

- A reduction or degradation of habitats for many forest-associated wildlife and plant species.
- Land development, increased human activity, and competition from invasive plant species which compromises plant diversity, habitat quality and connectivity.

Scaling down analysis to the Bitterroot National Forest level, about 72 percent of the forest is in the National Wilderness Preservation System or in inventoried roadless areas. Most of the western border is included in one of the largest wilderness areas in the continental United States, and the eastern border adjoins two smaller wilderness areas. This expanse of undeveloped and wilderness lands provides excellent north-south wildlife habitat connectivity for the length of the Bitterroot National Forest.

These very large, undeveloped habitat areas are extremely valuable for wildlife and plants and offset some of the risks identified in the Columbia River basin analysis. Large, undeveloped habitat areas are especially important to wide ranging carnivores and are one reason that nearly all the terrestrial and aquatic species present when Lewis and Clark journeyed through 200 years ago are still present today on the forest. Still, increasing human population, development in the valleys, and changing habitat conditions continue to pressure wildlife and plant species.

Forest-Wide Desired Condition Plan Component

## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. The Bitterroot National Forest would continue to have diverse native plant and animal populations that persist over time.

b. Important habitat features such as wallows, seeps, and licks, would be protected.

c. Riparian conservation areas would provide suitable habitat for aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals.

d. Species listed under the Endangered Species Act would be delisted or trend toward recovery.

e. A variety of conservation education programs and media would routinely promote conservation practices for threatened and endangered species and species of concern.

f. Populations of species of concern and species of interest would remain healthy within ecosystem capabilities.

g. Species of concern and species of interest would have effective conservation strategies.

h. Active raptor nests will be adequately protected during nesting season.

i. The Forest would provide high quality security and habitat for big game species.

j. The Forest would provide high quality mule deer and elk winter range.

k. Big game winter range would provide sustainable forage and browse, and human disturbance would be regulated to reduce physiological stress on wintering herds of deer and elk.

l. Connectivity areas would allow and encourage movement of desired animals and plants across the Forest and adjacent lands.

m. Invasive species or diseases would not become established or spread to new habitats.

n. Hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities would continue to provide economic and aesthetic benefits to local communities and forest visitors.

o. Forest visitors would be informed about and demonstrate appropriate behavior (such as proper food storage) that reduces risks to wildlife and plants and aids in the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

p. Traditional plant and animal resources would continue to be available for Tribal use.

## Forest Products

### Background

The low elevation ponderosa pine forests of the Bitterroot National Forest were an attractive source of high quality timber and other forest products for early settlers for a century or more. Although the steep, rugged, remote landscape of the Bitterroot National Forest placed natural limits on the amount of timber harvesting, the wood products industry was an important sector of the local economy, especially in the southern end of the Bitterroot National Forest.

By the 1970s, many people began questioning the wisdom of intensively managing the forest resources of the Bitterroot National Forest in general and specifically, some of the forest management practices, such as clearcutting and terracing. This controversy initiated a decline in the timber

management program and the subsequent near elimination of the local wood products industry. The log home manufacturing industry remains strong in the Bitterroot valley. The following table illustrates the trend in timber volume sold by the Bitterroot National Forest from 1961 through 2005[1].

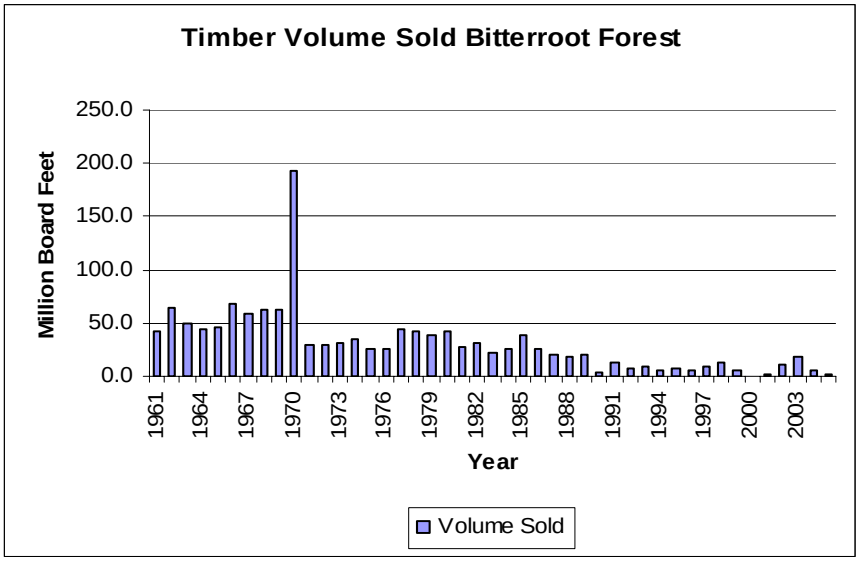


Figure 2: Timber Volume Sold on the Bitterroot National Forest.

Laws, regulation, and policy for the protection of the environment, increasing foreign imports, and declining timber management budgets also contributed to the decline of the forest products program. The program reached a low point in 2000 and has increased slightly since then due to products salvaged following the 2000 fire season. That fire event burned about 40 percent of the land base classified as "suitable for timber production."

The Bitterroot National Forest has always been a place where local residents and Tribes could harvest non-timber forest products, such as firewood, berries, or mushrooms. These uses of the Forest provide an important connection between people and their forest.

FW Desired Conditions Plan Component

## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Land classified as "suitable for timber production" would have a regularly scheduled timber harvest program that provides benefits to people while achieving ecosystem health and sustainability.

[1] The large amount of timber volume sold in 1970 is a reflection of a strong market and the sale of several years' worth of previously unsold timber sale offerings.

b. Land classified as "not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production," but where timber harvesting could occur for other multiple-use purposes, would have an irregular, unscheduled timber harvest program that achieves ecosystem health and sustainability while providing benefits to people.

c. Burned areas of land suitable for regularly scheduled timber production would be stocked with native tree species adapted to the specific site and fully restored to their productive capability.

d. Managed forests would provide commercial forest products, achieve vegetation objectives, and create forests that are more similar to historical forest conditions as described in the vegetation section of plan components.

e. A stable, predictable, and sustainable supply of forest products, known as the Timber Sale Program Quantity (TSPQ), would contribute to a local, stable, sustainable, and diverse forest products industry.

f. Small diameter forest biomass (less than 7 inches in diameter) would provide a variety of forest products, such as hog fuel, fuel chips, pulp, small diameter roundwood, and firewood.

g. Ten to twenty percent of trees that have been, or are in imminent danger of being, killed or damaged by fire, wind, insects or disease (especially large scale events) would be salvaged, while the value remains, and used for commercial forest products.

h. The Bitterroot National Forest would have a program of vegetation management in which timber sales are a tool to achieve desired conditions at or near the long-term sustained yield capacity of:

- 20 MMCF[1] per decade (98 MMBF[2]) from lands suitable for timber production.
- 0.3 MMCF per decade (2 MMBF) from other lands.

i. Non-timber forest products, such as firewood, berries, and mushrooms, would continue to be available for gathering in sustainable amounts for general public, commercial, and Tribal use.

j. There would be areas closed to commercial and mechanized harvest.

[1] MMCF = Million cubic feet.
[2] MMBF = Million board feet.

## National Forest System Lands

### Background

Management of National Forest System lands on the Bitterroot National Forest is important to protect the public's interest in its national forest. Surveying and posting the national forest boundary, maintaining posted property lines, and defending public lands from trespass or encroachment are activities that maintain the integrity of the National Forest System. About 328 miles of property boundary lines have been surveyed, marked, and posted, out of a total of 600 miles (55 percent complete). Approximately 342 miles of non-property boundary (Congressionally designated areas) have been identified as needing to be surveyed and posted.

Land ownership adjustments are one of the tools used to simplify and improve management of National Forest System lands. The acquisition, protection, and management of road and trail rights-of-way also ensure public access to National Forest System lands. The Bitterroot National Forest recently completed purchasing 5,760 acres (nine sections) of checkerboard pattern lands in the Rye Creek drainage. Additional purchases or land ownership adjustments are anticipated in future years.

Special use permits authorize the occupancy and use of National Forest System land by private individuals or companies for a wide variety of activities, such as roads, utility corridors, communication sites, dams, and other private or commercial uses, that cannot be accommodated on private land. There are 29 dams on the forest, most of which are privately-owned, authorized by special use permits and easements. The Bitterroot National Forest administered more than 200 special use permits (non-recreation) and collected $68,089 from these uses in 2004.

### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

FW Desired Conditions Plan Component

a. National Forest System property lines adjacent to private land and boundaries of special areas such as National Wilderness Preservation System lands would be clearly marked where encroachment is most likely.

b. Land ownership adjustments, through purchase, exchange, or other authority, would simplify and improve national forest management.

c. Existing public access to National Forest System land would be maintained and additional access would be provided by acquisition of new road or trail rights-of-way.

d. Federal ownership of developed recreation sites and lands adjacent to them would be retained.

e. Utility corridors and communication sites would use existing facilities, sites, and corridors rather than developing new sites.

f. Utility corridors and communication sites would be sized to fit the intended use and obsolete or unused facilities would not be present on the landscape.

## Livestock Grazing

### Background

Historically, western Montana was cattle and sheep country. Ranches were located on the valley floor and lower foothills of the Bitterroot valley. Many ranches had grazing permits on National Forest System land. This arrangement allowed ranchers to move the livestock off their ranches during the summer months so they could produce a hay crop.

Capable and suitable rangelands are limited on the Bitterroot National Forest. Most of the rangelands are also located in big game winter range areas. The steep, mountainous, forested terrain is not conducive to intensive livestock grazing. Livestock grazing occurs on grassland areas, under sparse forest canopies, in riparian areas, along roadsides, and on transitory rangelands created by timber harvesting or wildland fire. The key challenges to managing livestock are to meet established forage utilization criteria, provide periods of rest from season-long grazing, and protect riparian habitat conservation areas.

Livestock grazing on the Bitterroot National Forest peaked in the 1950s. Since that time, livestock numbers and grazing duration have steadily declined for the following reasons:

- Reduced timber harvesting and widespread fire exclusion decreased the amount of available transitory forage.
- Sale and subdivision of ranches and land adjacent to grazing allotments caused them to become vacant or made them inoperable.
- Grazing conflicts with wildlife and riparian habitat caused the Forest Service to reduce grazing.
- Invasive plant species have reduced the productivity of some ranges.

The Bitterroot National Forest currently manages 25 grazing allotments. Actual use has declined over the last 15 years from about 11,000 animal unit months (AUMs) to about 6,000 AUMs.

FW Desired Conditions Plan Component

### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Livestock grazing opportunities for cattle and horses would be maintained at levels that meet forage utilization guidelines and other design criteria.

b. Recreation pack and saddle stock grazing areas would not show signs of over-use or resource damage such as very short stubble heights, excessive stream bank trampling, or bare soil.

## Minerals and Geology

### Background

The Bitterroot National Forest, historically, has had only a few locations with significant amounts of precious or base metals. These locations appear to have been mined out and no recent interest has been expressed. As a result, there is limited mining activity on the Bitterroot National Forest at this time. The only active lode mine is located on Taylor Creek, on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. Although this mine once had a mill and extensive workings, only minor exploration activity has occurred in the last 15-20 years. There is ongoing exploration for rare earth minerals associated with fluorite deposits that occur in the Sapphire Mountains. A notice of intent to prospect for the mineral “columbium” has been submitted in the Sheep Creek area in the West Fork, and a notice of intent is submitted annually for the maintenance of an adit on Overwhich Creek.

According to the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, approximately 147 mine sites lie within the borders of the Bitterroot National Forest. Most of these mine sites are small or were never developed. There do not appear to be any serious water quality issues associated with sites on the Bitterroot National Forest.

There are no known oil and gas or coal bed methane occurrences on the Bitterroot National Forest. There is no potential for extensive geothermal development because hot spring temperatures are too low.

During the five-year period from 2000-2004, average annual sand and gravel production was approximately 3,000 cubic yards on lands administered by the Bitterroot National Forest. The Bitterroot National

Forest has two community rock collecting areas designated for non-commercial users. The rock sold from these sites is a blocky quartzite and the Forest sells about 200 tons per year.



### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. National Wilderness Preservation System lands, and administrative and recreation sites with an investment in facilities would remain withdrawn from (off limits to) mineral entry.

b. The Bitterroot National Forest would contribute to the nation's supply of mineral and energy resources while continuing to sustain the land's productivity for other uses and its capability to sustain ecosystems.

c. Abandoned mines would not endanger the environment, the public, or employees.

d. Mineral materials would be available on forest to support forest resource management such as road surfacing or protective rip-rap, personal use such as landscape rock, and commercial use if not available from private sources.

e. Forest Service facilities would be located and constructed so that the public would not be endangered by unknown or unexpected geologic hazards such as landslides or fault zones.

## Heritage Resources

### Background

The record of human presence on the Bitterroot National Forest spans at least 10,000 years. The Forest is part of the traditional homeland of the Bitterroot Salish people. Some bands of Kootenai and Pend d'Oreille lived here with the Salish, and others were frequent visitors. The Nez Perce inhabited lands in the Selway River portion of the Forest and often visited and traveled through the main Bitterroot valley. Forest lands along the Salmon River were home to Shoshone and Bannock people, who also ranged north and east throughout much of Montana.

Shortly after the early explorers arrived, both fur trappers and traders traveled along the Bitterroot River and its tributaries. By the 1880s, the natural resources of the land were attracting settlers to pursue farming, ranching, and logging. The construction of the railroad played an important role in the settlement and development of western Montana and the Bitterroot valley.

The Forest Service also played a major role in the history of western Montana. In the early 1900s, its responsibilities included: watershed protection; building trail and road systems; overseeing timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and mining activities; and suppressing forest fires.

The Forest Service is responsible for identifying and protecting heritage resources on National Forest System land. The Bitterroot National Forest has established an active heritage resource program that has focuses on identifying, protecting, and interpreting the Forest's cultural resources.

Portions of the Lewis and Clark, and the Nez Perce national historic trails pass through the Forest. These trails provide the public with a rare opportunity to walk in the path of history. The Forest also contains six sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These include: Alta Ranger Station, Lost Horse Guard Station, Horse Heaven Guard Station, McCart Lookout, Big Creek Lake Area, and Blackie Foster Cabin. Hundreds of other cultural sites exist throughout the Forest, and their management is governed by federal law and regulation.

Forest-Wide Desired Conditions Plan Component

### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Historic and pre-historic properties, such as early campsites, historic mine sites, and old cabins, would be identified, recorded, evaluated, protected, and interpreted as appropriate to preserve heritage values.

b. All eligible heritage properties would be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

c. Interpretive displays, visitor contacts, or brochures would be available to help national forest visitors and employees understand and appreciate the heritage resources associated with the Bitterroot National Forest.

d. The Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark national historic trails would be protected and interpreted as appropriate to preserve their character as it existed at the time of the historic events associated with these trails.

## Developed and Dispersed Recreation

### Background

Developed and dispersed recreation encompasses a broad and diverse range of activities. The Bitterroot National Forest offers a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities including hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, camping, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snowmobiling, off-

highway vehicle use (OHV), mountain bike riding, nationally recognized white water boating, and limited lake opportunities. Photographing and viewing the natural world are also important pursuits. These types of recreation experiences are extremely important to local and national visitors. Day visits from Ravalli and Missoula county residents make up the majority of the Forest's recreation activity. The increase in OHV use is currently causing the greatest challenge for managers because of inadequate routes designated as suitable for this use and riding in inappropriate areas. Designated wilderness lands and other undeveloped lands offer opportunities for primitive recreation such as hiking, riding horseback, backpacking, fishing, and hunting.

Demographic and population studies show that visitation to the Bitterroot National Forest and surrounding public lands will likely continue to grow. The Bitterroot valley continues to experience growth and development. With increasing numbers of recreationists, the Forest faces the task of managing the land in a way that offers a broad range of opportunities while reducing conflict between different user groups and minimizing effects on ecosystems and recreation settings. Despite the increasing need, funding for managing recreation resources has been inadequate to meet public expectations. This situation will likely continue in the future.

The evaluation, authorization, and administration of recreation special uses on National Forest System lands ensure that the public interest is being served. Recreation special use permits authorize the occupancy and use of national forest land by private individuals or companies for a wide variety of recreation activities, such as outfitter and guides, recreation events, summer homes, and other private or commercial recreation uses, that cannot be accommodated on private land.



## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Lands designated and recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System would offer primitive settings and experiences, while non-wilderness areas of the forest would provide a broader range of settings, experiences, and services.

b. Recreation settings and associated experiences would be diverse and stable as described by the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS).

c. A sustainable level of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities would be provided at a reasonable level of safety for users while continuing to contribute to the economic benefit of the surrounding communities.

d. Forest vegetation in developed sites would be diverse (species, size, and age) and complement recreational activities and visual quality.

e. There would be a mix of fee and non-fee developed recreation sites.

f. Developed recreation sites would be located where they can best serve and accommodate a growing demand for facilities, while keeping in mind the Forest's ability to maintain them to national standards.

g. Extreme recreation opportunities such as summer OHV "play areas," technical mountain bike courses, motor vehicle "challenge routes," and other high impact activities would not be provided on Bitterroot National Forest lands.

h. Forest users would be knowledgeable about and practice low impact techniques.

i. Snowmobiling routes and cross-country use areas would be available outside of recommended wilderness areas.

j. Outfitter and guides would provide high quality public services while assuring public health and safety, protecting resources, and minimizing conflicts with other users.

k. The Bitterroot National Forest would accommodate existing, well-maintained recreation residences that are compatible with other resources. Special use permits for recreation residences would be up-to-date.

l. Cabin rental opportunities that are clean, safe, and compatible with other resources would be provided

m. Nordic ski opportunities would be provided in appropriate management areas.

n. Additional downhill ski opportunities would be provided only through limited expansion of Lost Trail Powder Mountain Ski Area within Management Area 6.1.

o. Scenic quality across the forest would meet or exceed scenic integrity levels.

p. The Bitterroot National Forest would be a place where visitors and employees feel safe and facilities would be free from damages that result from negligence and criminal activities.

## Designated Wilderness

### Background

The Bitterroot National Forest encompasses 747,062 acres of designated wilderness, which accounts for approximately 47 percent of the forest. Wilderness areas on the Bitterroot National Forest extend beyond the forest boundary and the Forest shares its management responsibility with adjoining forests. The table below provides information on designated wilderness areas on the Forest.

Table 4: Designated wilderness on the Bitterroot National Forest.

| Name of Designated Wilderness | Total Acres | Acres within the Bitterroot National Forest | Percent of the Wilderness Located on the Bitterroot National Forest | Adjacent National Forests with Shared Wilderness Management |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Selway-Bitterroot | 1,340,681 | 511,997 | 38% | Clearwater, Nez Perce, Lolo |
| Anaconda-Pintler | 158,658 | 41,162 | 26% | Beaverhead-Deerlodge |
| Frank Church-River of No Return | 2,373,331 | 193,703 | 8% | Nez Perce, Salmon-Challis, Payette, Boise |

Visitor use is considered moderate to low in these designated wilderness areas compared to other units in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Recent studies in the Bob Marshall Wilderness show that day visits and trips of short duration are increasing and that extended stays into the interior are in decline. Similar trends are expected in the three wilderness areas on the Bitterroot National Forest. Resource and social impacts are increasing around trailheads, especially those near population centers. As the Bitterroot valley's population increases, more and more people are living in close proximity, with easy access, to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness contains 16 privately-owned irrigation dams, all of which were built around the turn of the Twentieth Century. These aging dams are in need of regular maintenance, and sometimes major repairs, in order to meet dam safety requirements. The Bitterroot National Forest faces the challenge of balancing wilderness values, dam safety, and private property rights in management of these wilderness dams.

The Selway River and main stem of the Salmon River are designated wild and scenic rivers that lie within wilderness areas. These rivers provide outstanding opportunities for white water river recreation in a wilderness setting.

With the increasing numbers of recreationists, the Bitterroot National Forest faces the task of managing its designated wilderness areas in ways that offer primitive opportunities while minimizing effects to the wilderness ecosystem. This task is further complicated as funding to manage the increasing demand is on the decline.

Forest-Wide Desired Conditions Plan Component

## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. The Bitterroot National Forest would provide high quality wilderness recreation settings while use and impacts would be consistent with the values defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act.

b. The Bitterroot National Forest would maintain primitive settings and experiences consistent with assigned opportunity classes or management zones.

c. Wildland fire use and management ignited fire would mimic natural fire processes in designated and recommended wilderness areas.

d. Human use of designated wilderness areas would not degrade natural resources or opportunities for solitude.

e. Wilderness would contain native plant and animal communities free of invasive species.

f. Professional outfitters and guides that practice “Leave no Trace” techniques would be readily available to assist wilderness visitors.

g. There would be a mix of outfitted and non-outfitted wilderness recreation opportunities.

h. Facilities in designated wilderness areas would generally not be present, except when they have historical value or are critical to the safety of employees.

i. Preservation of wilderness values would be balanced with the rights and responsibilities of private dam owners to maintain their dams in a safe condition.

## Access and Travel Management

### Background

The Bitterroot National Forest has about 2,500 miles of system roads that were constructed to support forest management activities, such as fire suppression, timber harvesting, mining, and recreation. In addition, there are about 1,500 miles of system trails. Much of the trail system has been in existence since the early 1900s or before. Later, as motorized transportation became common, many of the trails were abandoned or replaced by roads. The bulk of the road system was constructed in the decades following World War II when demand for building materials was high and the Bitterroot National Forest had a large timber sale program. This road and trail system now provides public access to the national forest.

In the last few decades, funding has not been sufficient to maintain all forest roads and trails to national standards, which are important for providing safety and minimizing resource impacts. Generally, the limited road funding received has been focused on maintaining higher standard roads that integrate other resource needs. Where maintenance requirements are not accomplished, conditions and trends show that:

- It has been difficult to meet federal safety requirements on the road system.
- User convenience has decreased.
- Risk of resource damage has increased on some roads and trails.

With population growth, there has been an increase in demand on forest roads as primary access routes to residential developments. Use of the road system is shifting from resource extraction to recreation and residential access, which carry requirements for higher safety standards. Protection of natural resources and lack of maintenance funding has limited motorized travel. During the last decade, the Bitterroot National Forest has made a concerted effort to align its road system with available funding.

Trail funding has also decreased; fewer trails are being maintained, with the focus on high use trails. Resource damage is occurring on some user-created trails across the Forest. Recreation use and the demand for motorized and non-motorized access have increased dramatically. Advances in performance and technology have resulted in increased access during summer and winter by off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and snowmobiles.

## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. The Bitterroot National Forest would have a transportation system of roads and trails that is aligned with budget levels.

b. The transportation system would provide reasonable and legal access for resource management and recreation.

c. Resource impacts from roads and trails would be balanced with the benefits of having the road or trail on the landscape and available for use.

d. Open roads and trails would be safe and convenient for public use.

e. Restricted (closed) roads would have native vegetation cover.

f. Roads with high residential access needs would be managed by the appropriate local, state, or federal agency.

g. Wheeled motorized use would occur on designated roads, trails, or areas.

h. All designated roads, trails, and areas open to motorized vehicles would be shown on a map and readily available to the public.

i. Roads would be located outside riparian conservati

that partnerships will become an increasingly important tool in the accomplishment of work on the Bitterroot National Forest.



### Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Partnerships would help achieve desired conditions and improve overall resource management. Partnerships would be important in fostering productive relationships with a knowledgeable and supportive constituency and local community to accomplish projects that are in the public interest.

b. Federal, state, local, and Tribal agencies and private landowners would be partners in the development and execution of coordinated resource management plans and projects.

c. The Bitterroot National Forest and potential partners would have an expressed mutual interest in, benefit from, and understanding of a common purpose(s) that helps achieve their respective missions.

d. Partnerships and projects would be widely recognized by the public as beneficial to resource management and as an appropriate and efficient use of Forest Service cooperative efforts and funding.

e. Partnership arrangements would be transparent to the public and free of real or apparent conflicts of interest or endorsement of commercial products, services, or entities.

## American Indian Rights and Interests

### Background

American Indian Tribes are sovereign nations with which the Forest Service establishes and maintains government-to-government relationships. Through treaties, Tribes have reserved rights and privileges for their Tribal members on off-reservation lands ceded to the U.S. Government. The Forest Service now manages some of those off-reservation lands ceded in the treaties and; therefore, has certain legal responsibilities to American Indian Tribes. These legal responsibilities are clarified in statutes, executive orders, and case law enacted and interpreted for the protection and benefit of federally recognized American Indian Tribes[1]. As part of meeting these responsibilities, we are required to consult with the American Indian Tribes whenever our proposed policies or forest management actions may affect their interests.

[1] Some of the major statutes, executive orders, and case law determinations are referenced in the document, *Forest Land and Resource Management Plans: American Indian Rights and Interests*, found in the Plan Set of Documents.

While federal laws apply to all federally recognized American Indian Tribes, each Tribe is different and is recognized as a separate and unique government. There are differences in treaty rights from one Tribe to another, there are significant cultural differences between Tribes, and there are differences in the historic relationships between Tribes and the lands on and near their current reservations. In some cases, several Tribes may each have legitimate interests in the same lands because they each may have occupied or otherwise used those lands during different historic periods. These factors and others combine to make each Forest Service-Tribal consultation relationship unique.

Because of the treaty rights of American Indian Tribes, Tribal members retain rights to use national forest lands in ways that are not allowed to the general public. On some occasions, access or use by the general public may be temporarily denied to allow American Indian people to exercise their treaty rights in privacy and solitude. When such uses or temporary closures occur, the participating Tribal members are typically required to verify their membership in a federally recognized Tribe.



## Forest-Wide Desired Conditions

a. Employees directly involved in forest management activities, including temporary employees, would understand their federal government trustee responsibilities. Employees would also understand the importance of American Indian treaty rights and interests in forest management decisions and implementation actions.

b. This understanding would be incorporated in all forest management activities, including our public information programs.

c. The Bitterroot National Forest would have a Memorandum of Understanding with any interested Tribe that has treaty rights on National Forest System lands.

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